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TOPIC NOTE

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➤ http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/gender_CSW

Rural women: striving for gender transformative impacts

In March 2018, at the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), once again the spotlight will be turned on to address the challenges and opportunities rural women and girls face.



This online discussion, led by FAO with IFAD, UN Women and WFP, invites you to reflect on the current understanding of gender dynamics of rural livelihoods and share information, views and experiences in preparation for CSW62. The main objective is to highlight critical gaps and priority areas for action on how to accelerate gender transformative impacts for rural women. The discussion will focus on three principal questions, presented below, over the next three weeks.

Changing context of rural livelihoods

Moving forward from the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the needs and priorities of rural women have been firmly on the development agenda and significant progress has been made. Many women have gained improved access to markets, information, financial services, greater engagement with the private sector, skills development, energy, labour-saving technologies and remittances, and some became successful entrepreneurs, leaders in the community and more respected in their homes. Women fulfil important roles throughout agrifood value chains, and play essential roles in food security and nutrition, and in the management of natural resources.

Nevertheless, the lives of many rural women remain unchanged. They work long hours combining productive work with unpaid care and domestic tasks, and their empowerment opportunities are constrained by limited security over land and an inability to borrow. Too often rural women cannot benefit from improved technologies, are exposed to the risks of climate change, and experience significant post-harvest losses. Their lives are also challenged by rapid population growth results in the youth bulge, out migration, an aging rural population and degraded natural resources.

Gender transformative approaches

To achieve the SDGs and “leave no one behind”, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for transformational change, in countries and at all levels. There is growing recognition that the standard approaches to addressing gender inequalities have often not been enough. Many gender mainstreaming initiatives have focused on empowering women economically – ensuring they have access to inputs, technical advice and markets, and have a voice in decision-making bodies and rural institutions – which contribute to short-term productivity gains. However, to enjoy long-term sustainable benefits, women want not only be able to work productively and have a voice in how the income they generate is spent. They want the quality of their lives to be improved, reduce the time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, and be free from gender-based violence.

More needs to be done – and in a different way - to achieve lasting benefits for improving the quality of life for rural women and their families. This involves moving beyond treating the symptoms of gender inequality, such as the unequal access to resources and benefits, to addressing the underlying causes deeply rooted in gender norms and behaviours, power relations and social institutions.

Question 1: What are the main challenges rural women and girls are facing today?

- The context of rural livelihoods has changed significantly during the past 20 years, with significant implications for rural women. Is our understanding of the challenges rural women and girls are facing still up-to-date?
- How do the needs and priorities of rural women differ based on their age, education, household composition, resource base and cultural context?
- How do some rural women manage to move forward and become successful entrepreneurs, whereas others are trapped in a life of food insecurity and poverty?

Question 2: Are we using the right approaches and policies to close the gender gap?

- How can the policy gap be closed? Most countries have ratified international and regional instruments to protect and enhance women’s rights. Yet, in many countries there is a gap between the policy framework on gender and what actually gets delivered, including the failure to mainstream gender considerations into other policy frameworks, such as food security and nutrition policies.
- Why is it so challenging to convince the private sector to engage with rural women as economic actors, despite the evidence demonstrating that this generates profitable outcomes?
- As we approach 2020, what are the emerging economic opportunities for rural women? Are current capacity development programmes enhancing the right set of skills for rural women and girls? How can we better update them?

Question 3: How can we best achieve gender transformative impacts?

- What can be done to strengthen women’s voice and wellbeing in the household and the community? Many initiatives focus on empowering women in their productive role and as members and leaders of producer and community groups. While they become

empowered in the public space, this does not necessarily translate into improved household dynamics and quality of life.

- Has sufficient attention been paid in engaging men and boys for positive behavioural change? Do they understand the links between gender roles and inequalities, and their impact on the productivity and wellbeing of their households? Are their needs being overlooked, resulting in their marginalisation and disengagement from household development?
- What approaches have proved successful to address deeply rooted gender norms, power relations and social institutions?

Thank you and I look forward to a stimulating discussion,

Clare Bishop